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THE FRANCO-RUSSIAN ALLIANCE.

BY THE HON. J. B. EUSTIS, LATE UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR
TO FRANCE.

MANY very able publicists take a pessimistic view of the present situation of France, maintaining that she is fast reaching the plane of a second-class power, notwithstanding the apparent rank that the Franco-Russian alliance permits her to take in the councils of Europe. Some attribute this imminent retrogression to the results of the crushing defeats she suffered in 1870, which have caused a new grouping of states in Central Europe, represented by the Triple Alliance, by which she has been displaced from her orbit. Others maintain that she is exhibiting symptoms of inherent national degeneracy, not the least alarming being the comparative decrease of her population. A third class maintain that to the egregious errors and follies of those who are entrusted with the responsibility of governing France are to be traced the diminution of her prestige and the threatened loss of her authority as a first-class European power.

Whatever may be the cause, one cannot but sympathize with this proud-spirited nation. If the time is soon to arrive for France to descend from her high position and take rank with second-class powers, it will date the triumph of militarism over liberalism ; and then civilization, humanity, and every department of learning will seriously feel the withdrawal of her preponderating influence upon the intellectual world and the political situation in Europe.

It must be admitted that the present situation of France is causing the gravest apprehension, and a deep-seated distrust as to her future destiny. Outside of the group of men who are to-day governing France, and who, of course, imagine they are upholding her proudest traditions and leading her to greater glory,

the sentiment in France is well-nigh universal that unless the present situation is changed she will become the victim of some great catastrophe which will imperil her national existence.

This sense of insecurity arises from a gradual reaction against the Franco-Russian alliance. What this alliance really is, the public does not seem to know. The most searching inquiry has failed to discover whether it exists by virtue of a treaty or convention, and what are its stipulations and engagements. The suspicion is growing in the French mind that this alliance is unilateral as regards immediate benefits or future compensations; that it has enabled Russia to establish over France a disguised protectorate; that the latter has surrendered her independence of action as a sovereign state, her foreign relations being controlled by the dictation of Russian interests.

This humiliating sacrifice which France, for the first time in her history, has been called upon to make could be endured by that proud nation if she could discover in this alliance a guarantee that Russia intended to aid her to gratify the aspirations that her national honor and military pride would never permit her to abandon.

After the French people had recovered from their pardonable enthusiasm over what was called the Franco-Russian Alliance, having been led by their government to believe that it meant something besides their humiliation, an important event occurred which partially unveiled its mysteries. China and Japan had signed their treaty of peace on April 19, 1895. Russia stepped forward, and in menacing tones told Japan, the victorious party, that she must tear that treaty to pieces, because Russia objected to it. Russia dragged France into this complication, in which she had not the remotest interest. She made France take the side of Chinese barbarism against friendly Japan, which by her treaties was entering into the family of civilized states. What was far worse, if Japan had resisted the demands of Russia, France might have been forced to fight side by side with Germany against a power which had not given her the slightest provocation.

It was indeed pitiable to hear the Minister of Foreign Affairs declare to the Chamber, when interpellated upon this question, that his only excuse for placing France in this indefensible attitude was that he wanted to be agreeable to Russia.

It was after this incident, which came near exposing France to an humiliation to which she would never have submitted, that the French Ministry deemed it necessary to pacify any possible agitation about the Franco-Russian alliance by holding out the expectation that Russia would aid France to reopen the Egyptian question and force England to evacuate Egypt.

In that case, the Franco-Russian alliance would certainly have signified a great deal ; but this question was raised by the French Ministry only to be buried as often as it was raised, and for a very good reason. Russia never seriously intended to aid France with reference to this Egyptian question. She seems to have considered that she was bestowing upon France sufficient proofs of her friendship by flooding her immense loans upon the French market, and by sending her naval officers and her Czar to be fêted in her brilliant capital. An inquiry was addressed by the writer to an English diplomatist, whose authority upon Egyptian affairs is not to be questioned, to ascertain what efforts the French government had made to secure the co-operation of Russia to force England to abandon her military occupation of Egypt. He replied that only once had such an effort been attempted. One day Sir N. O'Connor, the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg had called upon Prince Lobanoff, then the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs. To the amazement of the former the latter opened the conversation with a most vehement tirade against England with reference to the Egyptian question. The violence of his language astounded the English Ambassador. The latter retired, and the next day again called upon Prince Lobanoff. He informed him that he had prepared an exact report of the extraordinary interview of the previous day, but that before sending it to his government he desired to know if Prince Lobanoff adhered to the views he had expressed. As the English Ambassador expected, Prince Lobanoff implored him not to send to his government any report whatever of their conversation, and thus the matter ended. It would seem to have been nothing but a blind to satisfy the susceptibilities of the French Foreign Office. At any rate this is the kind of reciprocity Russia offered to France for her aid with regard to the China-Japan Treaty.

M. Millerand, a leader in the Chamber of Deputies, is one of the ablest men in France. As a parliamentary debater he has

no superior. When the events in the East began to impose upon the European powers the greatest responsibilities, he delivered a most remarkable speech. Without expecting that any state secret would be divulged he said that his object was to ascertain what reciprocal obligations France and Russia had assumed by reason of the Franco-Russian Alliance, as France might be drifting toward a point of serious danger, intimating that the interests, traditions, and dignity of France might be seriously affected by blindly following the dictation of Russian policy upon the Eastern question. It was a speech of extreme moderation, which attracted great attention.

M. Hanotaux's only reply was that the French Chamber must be satisfied with the toasts that had been exchanged between President Faure and the Czar, to which he had nothing to add. This declaration produced a most painful impression upon the French people. They understood that complimentary toasts might be pleasing to the personal vanity of those who exchanged them, but for a Minister of Foreign Affairs to tell the great intelligent and patriotic French nation that its fortunes and destinies were to be disposed of by toasts could hardly be accepted by them as a reassuring declaration as to the fate of their country.

If France had had a Talleyrand or a Thiers during the crisis in Turkey she could have played a leading rôle and by the weight of her influence and authority could have re-established her traditional prestige, not only in the Orient, but in Europe. Such an opportunity an able statesman would have grasped to prove that France was still a great power, ready, as in the past, to champion the cause of civilization, of oppressed nationalities and of religious toleration. She occupied the privileged position of disinterestedness as regards Turkish territory, and upon her the European powers had imposed by treaty the protection and patronage of the Catholic Armenian church. For these reasons she could have spoken with greater moral force than any other European power. Supported by the sentiments of the civilized world, by her traditions, and by the voice of Christianity within her own borders, she could have forced the bloodthirsty Sultan to kneel before an indignant and horrified Europe.

Such an attitude would have involved no peril to France, for Italy and Austria had promptly accepted Lord Salisbury's prop-

osition of the 20th of October, 1896, to notify Abdul-Hamid that the European powers would use force to compel him to execute the reforms demanded.

But there was all the time a serious obstacle which was advantageous to Russian policy, but which was most discreditable to the French government. When Prince Lobanoff visited France, ostensibly for his health, he and M. Hanotaux secretly arranged the policy to be followed by their respective governments in dealing with the Eastern question. That programme, which was adhered to with cruel obstinacy, was practically a notification to the "Sultan Rouge" that he could continue his massacres with impunity because he and his Ottoman Empire would not be disturbed. In what way could the French government have given the Turkish government greater encouragement except by congratulating him upon his bloody work ?

One can readily give credence to the story related in diplomatic circles that the Sultan never even smiles ; but after he had ascertained the position of the Russian and French governments, if any one spoke to him of reforms he would burst out into a peal of laughter. This was the only topic that could excite the risibility of that sombre, atrabilious and sanguinary fanatic.

Contrary to the advice of M. Cambon, its firm, able and far-seeing Ambassador at Constantinople, in opposition to his most earnest remonstrances, the French government continued to place implicit confidence in the repeated promises of the Sultan when M. Cambon had warned M. Hanotaux in an official dispatch not to believe a single word of Munir-Bey, the Turkish Ambassador at Paris, or of the Sultan, because the latter did not intend to keep a single one of his promises.

Upon what theory is to be explained this perfect accord of the French and Russian governments with reference to this Turkish question ? Which one of these two governments was the controlling authority in securing this solidarity of diplomatic action ? Whose interests were to be subserved by this joint policy of abstention from even any pressure upon the Sultan ?

It is not difficult to understand the far-reaching policy and aims of Russia as regards Turkey.

After two wars her ambitious schemes have been foiled by the action of the European powers. Notwithstanding her immense

sacrifices of men and money, Russia became powerless to secure her domination over the Ottoman Empire. Therefore she had to change her tactics without changing her traditional policy, and that was to maintain the *status quo* so that by mal-administration and by massacres the Ottoman Empire would reach a state of decomposition and consequent dismemberment. To quote the expression of an eminent diplomatist, "*Il faut laisser la Turquie pourrir dans son jus.*" "Turkey must be allowed to rot in her own juice," was the new watchword of Russian diplomacy in dealing with the Turkish question.

On December 21, 1895, M. Montebello, the French Ambassador at St. Petersburg, stated in a dispatch to his government: "Prince Lobanoff is now, as he has always been, of opinion that pressure cannot, on every occasion, be exerted on the Sultan for all incidents which may still arise in Armenia."

Mr. Gosselin, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Paris, writes in a dispatch to Lord Salisbury: "Both the German Ambassador and the Austro-Hungarian Chargé d'Affaires, whom I have seen since the debate, are of opinion that the French government will with difficulty be brought to assent to a policy of coercion," and this opinion would seem to be borne out by the passage of M. Hanotaux's speech in which His Excellency distinctly repudiates any *immixtion directe*, or anything in the shape of a *condominium*.

Other dispatches could be quoted to the same effect, but these sufficiently indicate the complete *entente* between the foreign office at St. Petersburg and that in Paris, and the persistency with which they adhered to the doctrine of non-intervention. It was not intended that these "incidents" should be allowed to disturb the equanimity of the French and Russian governments, or that the Sultan should have reason to fear coercion from the other powers, so long as Russia guaranteed him against any "pressure" and France against any *immixtion directe*.

One can easily appreciate the pathetic force of M. Denis Cochim's appeal in the Chamber to the French government:

"The friendship of France entails corresponding duties, the first and most sacred being to know how to defend the weak and take the part of the oppressed, and to make sacrifices on behalf of justice and liberty. Such is the price of the friendship of France; pray explain it, M. le Ministre, to our friends."

It was only when, to the amazement of the European powers, the Sultan stated his terms of peace that the French government seemed to realize that its excessive Turkophilism, fostered by Russian influence and Russian interests, had made the Sultan master of the situation.

It has not been the purpose of the writer to discuss the Eastern question. It has been used only to illustrate one single phase of the Franco-Russian alliance. Nor has it been his purpose to criticise the French people for having favored this alliance, whatever it may be.

In the face of the Triple Alliance, France had one of two courses open, either to be self-reliant and independent, falling back upon her own resources to brave every peril, and prepare for a supreme and heroic effort to defend her territory and maintain her national existence, or to seek to make an alliance with Russia, the only power accessible to her. No nation could be called upon to decide a more momentous question.

Exhausted by a disastrous war and agitated by a fratricidal strife, it was natural that the French people should yearn for a peace that promised to them public security and exemption from that wearying and terrible anxiety which is the fate of a power situated like France. One who has witnessed the gradual development of that sentiment in favor of the Franco-Russian alliance should be the last person to criticise the French people for having sought self-preservation in that only refuge within their reach. When Thiers returned from the European capitals which he had visited to secure the friendly aid of some foreign powers to mitigate the harsh terms of the treaty of peace between Germany and France, and announced to the French people that his appeals for sympathy had been unavailing, he revealed the fact that France was a completely isolated power, and from that time until the period of the Franco-Russian alliance the situation of France has been extremely perilous and the public anxiety has been intense. But this alliance has its dangers and its complications. A liberal enlightened European power like France cannot make an alliance with autocratic Russia, a semi-Asiatic nation, without sacrifices which may affect prejudicially her interests and national dignity.

There can be no affinity of sentiment, no community of ideas, no sympathetic tie, no political solidarity, between France and Rus-

sia. The former has free institutions; in the latter personal and political liberty, public opinion, freedom of the press, and parliamentary responsibility are utterly unknown. Yet, if the men who govern France had been far-seeing statesmen, such an alliance could have been utilized to increase the grandeur, the prestige, and the power of France. The apprehension exists that her national virility is being gradually extinguished by an unnecessary subserviency to Russian authority and Russian political interests. France has confronted many serious crises and she has always been saved by her great statesmen. She is to-day able to produce them, and if to the great loss of civilization, humanity, and the enlightenment of the world it should become her fate to be relegated to the position of a second-class power, her humiliation and degradation will not be ascribable to the degeneracy of her people, but to the incompetence of those who are entrusted with her fortunes and her destiny.

J. B. EUSTIS.